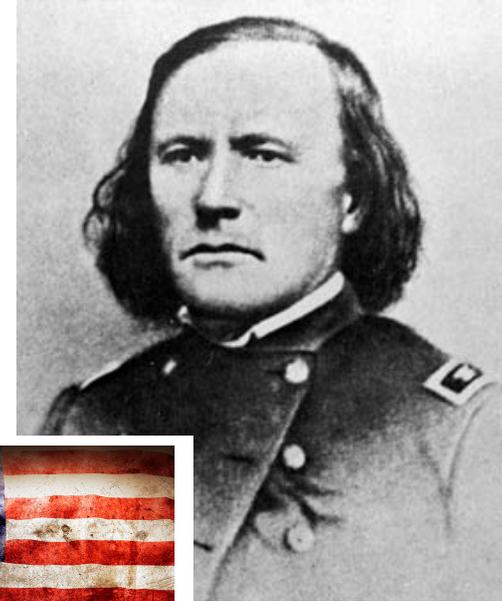


**The Kit Carson Home and Museum, 113 Kit Carson Road
Taos, NM 8751/ 575-758-4945 www.kitcarsonmuseum.org**

MEET KIT CARSON

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Kit Carson's Home in Taos, New Mexico

The Kit Carson Home and Museum

The Life of Kit Carson

Born in Kentucky on Christmas Eve, 1809, Christopher Houston Carson, known as “Kit,” left home at age 16 to take his chances in the Wild West learning to be a mountain man, trapper and explorer. Kit lived among the native tribes and learned their ways and languages. Carson met and married a beautiful Arapaho woman called Singing Grass, and had two daughters with her. Singing Grass died young, as did one of their daughters, and Carson soon married another Native American, a Cheyenne woman named, Making Our Road.

Carson became known for his ability to scout and lead parties of travelers through the dangerous wilderness. His talents soon attracted explorers like John C. Fremont, who was looking for a path to the Pacific Coast. Carson and Fremont together discovered the Oregon Trail, one of the first pioneer trails to reach

Carson was a courier and scout during the Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848. During this time he made his first coast-to-coast journey, from California to Washington D.C., on horseback, to deliver news of the war to the U.S. government.

When the American Civil War began in 1861, Carson, having made his way to New Mexico much earlier, joined the New Mexico Volunteer Infantry organized by his friend, Ceran St. Vrain. Having distinguished himself in several battles during this time, Carson came to be noticed by General James H. Carleton.

Carleton was ambitious and very keen to make a successful reputation for himself in the struggle to settle the West. The U.S. Army was tasked with subduing the Navajo peoples, who were battling to hold on to their lands. Carleton ordered Carson to destroy the Navajo. Carson was appalled at the violence of his orders and resigned his commission. Carleton denied Carson’s resignation and instead adjusted his plans for the Navajo assault. Carson was forced to initiate a “scorched earth” policy on the Navajo, effectively burning their food supply. There is consensus that Carson regretted his role in these actions until his death.



Kit Carson Played Many Roles Kit Carson, was Taos’ most famous citizen in the 1850s. He was a mountain man, explorer, scout, trapper, cattle and sheep rancher, officer in the United States Army, transcontinental courier, and United States Indian agent. Because of his many careers and talents Kit became a mythical folk hero in the minds of many Americans.

Freemason - Carson was initiated as a Freemason on March 29, 1854, in Montezuma Lodge No. 109, A. F. & A. M., Santa Fe, Territory of New Mexico. By the beginning of 1859 there were at least ten Masons living in Taos. On November 16, 1860 they formed the Bent Lodge No. 42 in Taos. The new Lodge was named in honor of Governor Charles Bent who had been massacred in Taos during the Taos Indian Rebellion of 1847. Carson became a charter member and the first Junior Warden of the new Bent Lodge No. 42.



Kit Carson Was an Indian Agent



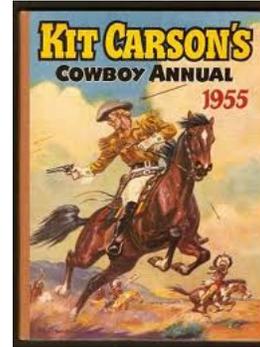
Carson became a Federal Indian Agent to the Ute, Moache (a band of the Ute), Jicarilla Apache and Taos Pueblo Tiwa people in 1854. He met with many

representatives from these tribes in his office (Room 4.) These meetings were said to last for many days as the Indians had so far to travel. The visitors would camp in tents and teepees in the Courtyard. Josefa, and her sisters who lived across the street, would cook for all the children and all the visitors.

Carson was said to be one of the only honest and effective agents in the difficult history of U.S.-Native American relations. He learned Spanish when he was a teenager. He learned French when he was a trapper. He was fluent or could make himself understood in various indigenous languages, for instance, he knew enough to speak Diné (Navajo), Apache, Comanche, **Cheyenne**, **Arapaho**, **Crow**, **Blackfoot**, **Shoshone**, **Paiute** and **Ute**.



Maria Josefa Jaramillo Carson was known in Taos as a true beauty. She and her sister, Maria Ignacia, the common-law wife of New Mexico Governor, Charles Bent, were in the Bent home in Taos when the Governor was attacked and killed by a group violently protesting the annexation of New Mexico by the United States. Josefa was a tough, hard-working woman who almost singlehandedly raised their seven children and three adopted children while Kit was away during the war.



“Blood and Thunder”

“In camp was found a book, the first of the kind I had ever seen, in which I was made a great hero, slaying Indians by the hundreds.”
Kit Carson

Carson became America’s first western hero in the popular culture of the time. Overly enthusiastic writers used Kit’s ‘sCarson’s

name to sell accounts of these fictitious adventures. Even though untrue, these works portrayed him as larger than life. Carson was the undisputed star of this genre known as Blood and Thunders.

Can You Find the Answer?

1. What does the word infantry mean?
2. What kind of rifle did Carson carry?
3. What year did Carson die and where?
4. What tribe of Native Americans did Carson accompany to Washington D.C. ?
5. Who was the husband of Josefa’s sister Ignacia?
6. What is the meaning of the word “annexation?”

All but two answers can be found in the text.

Kit Carson Could Not Read or Write

Strange as it seems Kit Carson could not read or write. Even though he was fluent in many Native languages he was illiterate. He missed the opportunity to go to school when his father, a farmer, died in an accident in 1818. Carson was ashamed of his ignorance and did his best to hide it. Late in life, after much practice, he was able to sign his name. He also learned to speak Spanish.

Firearms



From the viewpoint of Kit Carson, owning a gun was essential in the 1800s. As you enter the Museum and walk through the shop, the first room contains a shotgun reportedly used by Carson, a spyglass similar to one he used, and a .50 caliber Hawken rifle that is an exact replica of his original gun (the original is in the Masonic Temple in Santa Fe.)

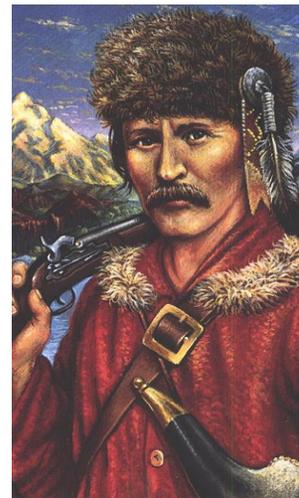
The Graves of Kit and Josefa



Kit and Josefa's graves are a few blocks walk from the Museum in the Kit Carson Memorial Park Cemetery. Although both Kit and Josefa passed away in Colorado it was their wish to have their final resting place be in Taos, which is where they are buried today.

After the War, Carson returned to Taos where he again became an official Federal Indian Agent and personally escorted four Ute Chiefs to Washington D.C. for negotiations. When he returned, his third wife, Maria Josefa Jaramillo Carson, was very ill from complications of giving birth to their eighth child. Carson moved her to Colorado to be closer to better medical care. There, Josefa died on April 23, 1868. In one month to the day, on May 23, 1868, Kit passed away as a result from earlier injuries. Their bodies were brought to Taos, where they are buried today not far from the Museum in the Kit Carson Memorial Park Cemetery.

READING IS FUN! Two good books about Kit Carson you might like to read are *Kit Carson and the Wild Frontier* by Ralph Moody and *The Life of Kit Carson* by Alan E. Grey - both of these books are available in the Museum Shop.



Mountain Man

Kit Carson said that the happiest days of his life were when he was "mountain man" living in the wild. During this time he learned from Native Americans the skills that would make him so desirable as a scout and explorer. Carson had traveled the entire American Southwest by the time he was 26 years old.

THE U.S. FLAG FLIES 24/7 IN TAOS, NM because in 1861 Carson and three other Freemasons held vigil for four days and nights to protect the flag from Confederate sympathizers. Only a few other places in the country are permitted to fly the American flag 24 hours a day - two of them are at The White House and on the Green in Lexington, Massachusetts.